

Building Livable Communities *Through Transportation*

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FEDERICO PENA

The Secretary of Transportation

Washington, D. C.

Dear Friend,

One of my highest priorities for the Department of Transportation has been to look at how transportation investments impact people. Transportation is about more than concrete, asphalt, steel and vehicles, It is about people's day-to-day lives. I am therefore delighted to share the stories from five projects generated under the leadership of Gordon Linton of the Federal Transit Administration and Rodney Slater of the Federal Highway Administration. Comprehensive community-based planning is at the heart of U.S. DOT's National Partnership for Transportation and Livable Communities, which builds on the principles embodied in the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act.

What the stories told in this booklet-from both rural and urban areas- have in common is that they approach transportation holistically rather than as a series of individual parts. The projects are evidence of the synergy that results when planning is inclusive and cooperative.

It is encouraging to see the spirit of commitment to positive change and renewal in communities all over America. In the years ahead, through the partnership, that includes not only transit and highways but also communities and businesses, I want to do everything in our power to foster that positive spirit.

Sincerely,



Federico Pena

October 1, 1996

Los Angeles, California

Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative

Every community can use a Helen Johnson. She is passionate, charming, optimistic and smart. She is a fighter who has walked the streets and knocked on doors to rally her neighbors in the Vermont Square section of southwest Los Angeles. And she has deep roots in the community-as she puts it, "I'm not going anywhere."

Every community can also use a

resources that local groups and residents had to offer. So, after gaining the support of Secretary of Transportation Federico Pena, he launched the Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative (LANI)-an innovative program that cultivates grassroots planning and supports it with organizational savvy and seed money. The mayor, with the help of other elected officials, selected Vermont

Square and seven other transit-dependent neighborhoods to participate.

Vermont Square, whose 12,000 residents are mostly African-Americans and Latinos, was badly affected by the 1992 civil unrest. The destruction offered brutal evidence that many

friend in City Hall. In 1994, Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan concluded that top-down community revitalization programs were failing because they ignored the unique needs of neighborhoods and the

residents felt disconnected from their neighborhoods, a reality that struck a chord in distressed urban communities throughout the country

LANI received early funding from a \$2.3 million FTA Livable Communities grant to rebuild connections in Vermont Square and the other communities. The powerful



Above Helen Johnson, chair of the Vermont Square Neighborhood Steering Committee stands in front of the future community garden

Left Residents come out to watch trees being planted in a LANI community



combination of local knowledge and commitment, professional expertise and political support has already resulted in visible changes. The city is planting trees, painting



light fixtures and hanging colorful banners (designed by a local student and selected in a competition) along Vermont Avenue, the neighborhood's main street. Residents are building a sculpture garden and community garden, and a neighborhood logo is being affixed to planters.

LANI is based on a handful of simple but hard-learned premises. First, it starts with people like Helen Johnson, people who have both a stake in the neighborhood's future and a sense of initiative. In each community LANI created a steering committee that brings together residents, businesses, schools and community institutions. Johnson chairs the Vermont Square steering committee, which began holding community planning meetings in mid-1994 and within six months had recommended a series of modest, yet catalytic, improvements.

Second, LANI focuses on improving the areas near bus stops and rail stations. Businesses along Vermont Avenue have been struggling, even though buses carry some 4,330 people up and down the street every day. Transit stops not only are focal points for shopping, services and social activities, but also present a neighborhood's public face to transit riders, who are potential customers and residents.

Finally, LANI puts a priority on pragmatic solutions that leverage additional resources and help neighborhoods build the confi-

dence and capacity-infrastructure, skills, organization-they need to pursue more ambitious, long-term goals. Indeed, Vermont Square's long-range plans call for creating jobs and helping youth.

LANI not only provides assistance in organizing and planning but also helps communities put their plans into action. In early 1995, LANI used its access to key city officials to arrange a two-day "town meeting" during which the eight communities and their design consultant³ presented plans to representatives from city agencies that would have a role in approving them. This meeting was part of a streamlined approach that helped prevent months of frustration, conflicting advice and gridlock that could have resulted had each group gone to each agency independently.

Also, LANI uses its knowledge and influence to assemble resources from multiple federal, state, city and private sources and pass them through to projects planned by local

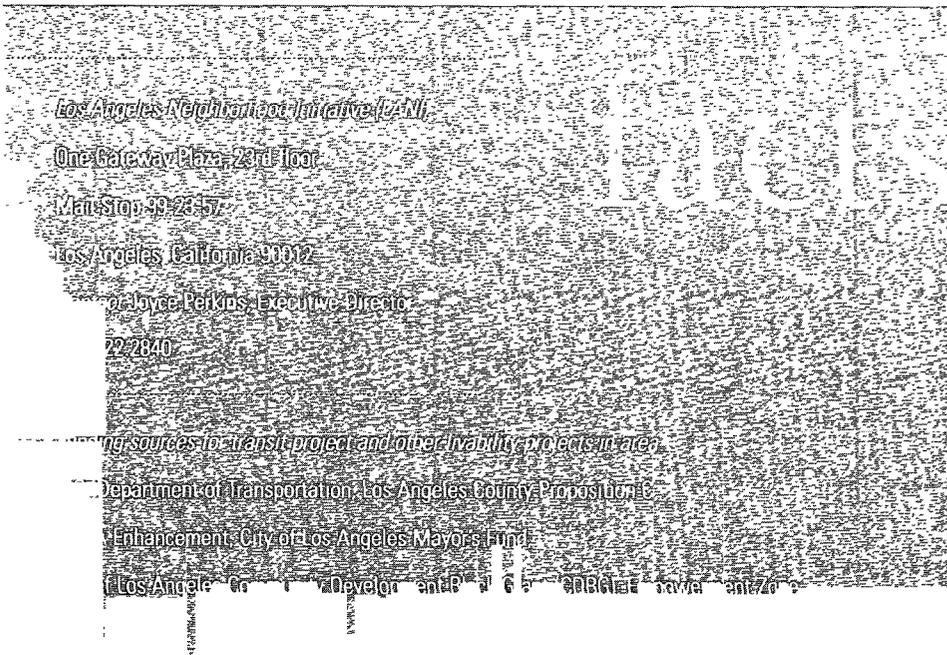
communities. Already, the program has attracted a supplemental \$1.6 million Livable Communities grant and \$2 million in other funding and in-kind gifts.

LANI has gone through a thorough evaluation and will make adjustments in the next phase of the program. On their part, the eight steering committees have learned that there is no one path to community participation-each neighborhood must find the techniques that best suit its needs. Moreover, the

challenge of sustaining interest and momentum is ongoing. Funding is often for capital projects, not for the staff positions that make projects happen, and many of the activities rely on volunteers.

Nevertheless, the groups have been empowered to expand the foundations laid by the LANI program. Some are linking with local community development corporations (CDCs); others are forming their own CDCs or local business improvement districts. But they never forget their roots, as Johnson says: "Vermont Square keeps working to get more and more citizens involved, because our success is everyone's success."

Opposite page Bus stops that provide simple amenities-shade from the sun, seating, a trash receptacle and a place for community notices-were donated by Gannett Transit to the LANI neighborhoods.





Like the transit corridors of the eight communities in LANI, Woodbridge, New Jersey, saw that its transit stop could become a catalyst for downtown revitalization and a focal point of community life.

The 1995 renovation of the commuter train station in Woodbridge, New Jersey, provided New Jersey Transit with the opportunity to do more than just routine physical Improvements to a station building. NJ Transit viewed the project as an opportunity to use transit to make a



Rendering of a newly designed entrance to Woodbridge Station

significant difference in a community. Woodbridge sorely needed improvement. the "train station" was nothing but a graffiti-filled, dimly lit tunnel in the side of a railroad viaduct, overgrown with weeds. Here was also the chance to try out a broader approach to station improvement; the mayor of Woodbridge Township and other local leaders were eager to try to integrate the station more closely into the town.

The station building at Woodbridge is situated at the far end of an elevated

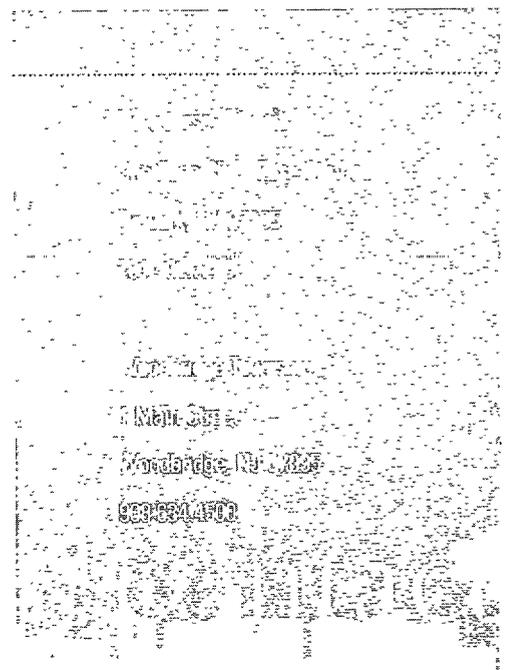
viaduct and had little visibility either from the street or from the adjacent downtown area. This was deemed detrimental to NJ Transit's ability to attract additional riders, and to efforts on the part of Woodbridge businesses to attract train passengers to stop and shop on

their way to or from the station. The platform and station building are reached by a tunnel and stairway at the north end and by a stairway at the south end. Before the Improvements, the only indication of the station at the street level main entrance was two enormous advertising billboards flanking the gaping

hole of the tunnel. The station's **lack of** presence compelled one passenger to remark, "You can't even tell you're at a train station."

Information was collected through surveys of passengers, NJ Transit employees and adjacent retailers regarding their concerns about the station and suggestions for improving its design and function. Parking, circulation, seating placement, station upkeep and patterns of use at the station throughout the day were also observed. A series of recommendations for design improvements were developed based upon this input.

The project, one of five pilot projects of NJ Transit's Station Renewal program, involved the renovation of existing facilities, the construction of a new entrance to the train station and the addition of amenities to better serve NJ Transit users. Through these and other changes, the train station became more visible in the town and pedestrian access to the station was enhanced. A sense of place was created at the station where previously there had been none. In addition, the station project complemented a streetscape and downtown revitalization project already underway in Woodbridge.



PROJECT

Clarksdale, Mississippi

Delta Area Rural Transit System

Think of public transit, and you usually think of dense urban areas where buses, trolleys or subways carry people on trips ranging from several blocks to several miles. But that's not always the case; more than 30 million people in this country rely on tran-

The Delta's bus system has its roots in a health center that Dr. Aaron E. Henry and community leaders opened in Clarksdale in 1979. Soon after the center opened, its staff realized that many people in the five-county area it served had no economical means of traveling to

the center or to other critical health-care facilities, such as Kidney Care, which provides dialysis treatment. So in 1990 the health center became a transportation provider as well, launching the Delta Area Rural Transit System (DARTS) with two minivans purchased with funds

Left One of the fifteen buses and minivans that travel hundreds of miles in rural Mississippi taking people to medical services and jobs



sit systems that serve rural areas. Mississippi's Delta region, for example, has a growing bus system that provided 92,000 trips in 1995. Passengers commonly make round trips of one hundred miles or more, riding buses and minivans to jobs, medical services, senior citizens programs and more.

from the federal Department of Health and Human Services.

Initially, DARTS only provided transportation for those who needed medical services. But in the Delta region, the lack of public transit often hinders access to jobs, the delivery of human services and economic development in general. It became evident rather quickly that there was more that DARTS could do.

Aurelia Jones-Taylor, the health center's executive director, realized that DARTS could provide a necessary service for the region and bring new revenue to the center. In 1993, DARTS won funding from the Mississippi Department of Transportation to open its buses to anyone and tailored its routes to serve people going to and from jobs-primarily at the state penitentiary and casinos on the Mississippi River. These changes coincided with the center's move to a new facility (also in Clarksdale), where there was room for an expanded vehicle pool and maintenance facilities.

Today DARTS runs fifteen buses along seven fixed routes serving seven counties, and provides charter service for schools, churches and civic groups as well. Currently, 70 percent of DARTS passengers are workers traveling to jobs. One rider on the ninety-minute trip from



Clarksdale to Bally's Casino up the river in Robinsonville said he moved to the region because of the job opportunities-to which he would not have access without DARTS.

But some aspects of DARTS's operation have not kept pace with its growth. Drivers' schedules and routes are still coordinated by hand and posted on a wall in the mainte-

nance area. The buses are not maintained on a regular basis, and breakdowns are leading to escalating repair costs. If a bus driver gets stuck at 1 a.m. on the way back from the casino, he calls DARTS's director, Louise Bradford, who has to figure out what to do-on the spot.

The U.S. DOT is helping DARTS catch up. A \$100,000 Livable Communities grant will help the system improve its marketing and purchase software that it can use to coordi-

Transportation, land use, economic activity and employment opportunities

make up the core components of livable communities. The absence of any of these elements represents an opportunity missed and a responsibility not fulfilled.

- Gloria Jeff, Associate Administrator, Federal Highway Administration

nate scheduling and dispatching. A separate FTA grant will pay for renovating an existing facility into a modern repair shop, which will help DARTS both improve its maintenance program and generate new revenue by taking on maintenance contracts for other public and private fleet operators.

The demand for DARTS continues to grow, especially as new projects seek to take advantage of its service. A new health clinic just opened in Como, 60 miles from Clarksdale, and the doctor in charge is count-

ing on DARTS to transport her clients. A convention center is being planned in Batesville, 45 miles from Clarksdale, and a bus drop-off and pick-up area is integral to the design

Modest investments like the grants that have helped DARTS along its way are making the Delta a more livable region. "Livable Communities support will help us do a better job by improving our responsiveness, visibility and scope," Jones-Taylor says. "DARTS has become a critical link between the people of the Delta and the increasing opportunities that await them."



Above One of DARTS' s clients

Opposite page The current system used for scheduling and dispatching drivers

A Livable Communities grant will purchase software that will improve this method

Arnold Henry Community Health Center, Inc.
 Delta Area Rural Transit System
 101 Highway 627
 P.O. Box 1246
 Clarksdale, Mississippi 38614
 Director: Aurelia Jones-Taylor, Executive Director
 Bradford, Transit Manager
 1292
 Resources for transit project and other livability projects in area
 Department of Transportation, Mississippi Department of Transportation,
 Department of Health and Human Services, County Board of Supervisors,
 Clarksdale, Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA)
 Clarksdale, Mississippi 38614

facts



Rural areas like the Delta region of Mississippi, and major urban neighborhoods like the Watts section of Los Angeles, have in common the need to create new forms of transit.

Watts is an economically disadvantaged neighborhood in Los Angeles, an area that never fully recovered from the well-known Watts riots in the mid-1960s. Since that time, there has been a great deal of investment in the area, especially in the form of community services, retail, educational and health facilities. While the hospital, shopping center and park have done much to improve the livability of the neighborhood for residents, many people were unable to reach these destinations. They were scattered throughout the community and were not served by regular transit routes. Residents approached their local councilwoman with a proposal to solve the problem — a fixed-route shuttle bus service that would circulate throughout the neighborhood and connect residents to vital community centers.

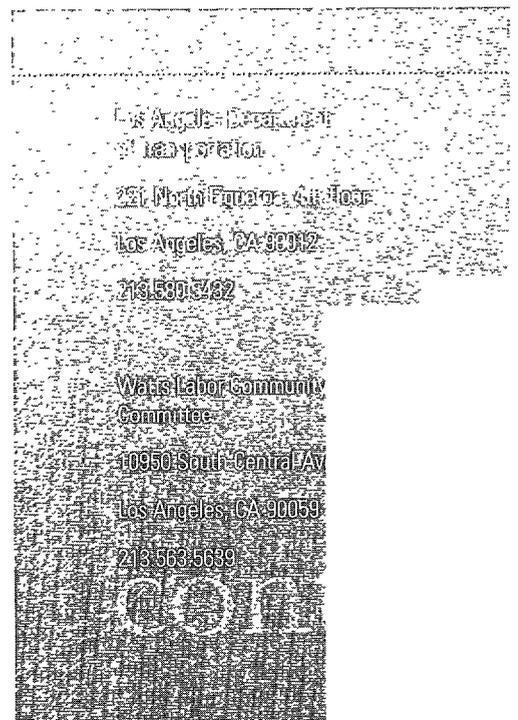
The Mayor and City Council responded to the community's concerns by establishing a one-year transportation demonstration project to initiate shuttle service in the greater Watts community. The project was funded through Proposition Local Transit Assistance (PALTA) moneys.

Los Angeles Department of Transportation staff worked with the Watts Labor Community Action Committee and other groups to identify the community's activity centers, and WLCAC helped the community develop and propose the route it wanted to the City Council.

In September 1990, two buses (with one backup) began to travel a bidirectional route every forty-five minutes. The route connects residents to the neighborhood's most important destinations, including Will Rogers Memorial Park, City Hall, the post office, the Health Foundation, a hospital, a job and vocational preparation center, a social services facility and two plazas within the neighborhood's retail and

commercial corridor. It also connects to the 103rd Street and Imperial Metro Blue Line stations, serving a light rail line that runs between downtown Los Angeles and the city of Long Beach.

Providing social services for a community without providing patrons with the means to reach them reduces both the effectiveness and success of these programs. According to Teddy Watkins, director of WLCAC, today nineteen operators run 120 DASH buses throughout L.A. The DASH Watts is the most successful, however, primarily because it connects transit-dependent individuals with the destinations they need to reach and the social services upon which they depend.



PROJECT

New York, New York

Frederick Douglass Circle

In New York City, citizens groups abound, with people taking part in block associations and community planning boards and passing judgment on everything from street sweeping to skyscraper construction. Nevertheless, many New Yorkers still feel skeptical about their ability to influence the decisions that

main streets and Central Park converge, that has bus and subway connections, and that is a gateway to three culturally diverse neighborhoods—Harlem, Morningside Heights and Manhattan Valley

But the circle falls far short of its potential. It is primarily a busy intersection—treeless, fragmented by

traffic lanes, a nightmare for pedestrians and difficult even for cars to negotiate. The subway station is neglected and underused, the bus stops are poorly defined and unwelcoming, and businesses around the circle are struggling.

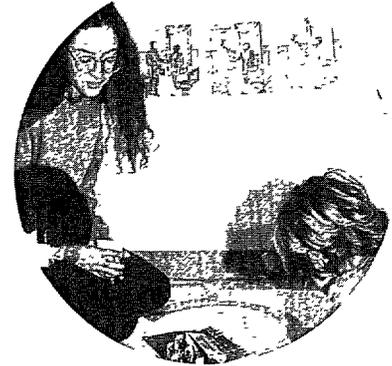
So when flyers asking for help in redesigning the

circle appeared in early 1995, many residents were dubious. But now they are part of a planning partnership between the community, city agencies and a nonprofit group that has not only turned out creative ideas for rebuilding the circle but may also result in real change.

In early 1993, residents of an apartment building facing the circle asked the Central Park Conservancy—which had enjoyed enormous

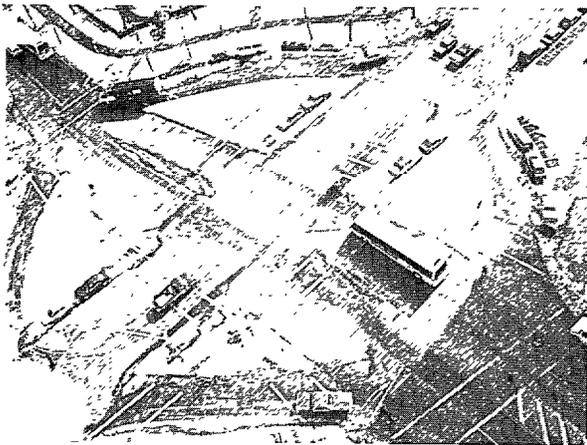
shape their neighborhoods.

For years, residents had waited for the city to rebuild Frederick Douglass Circle, located at the northwest corner of Central Park. The circle, named after the great African-American orator, writer and statesman, is an area where four

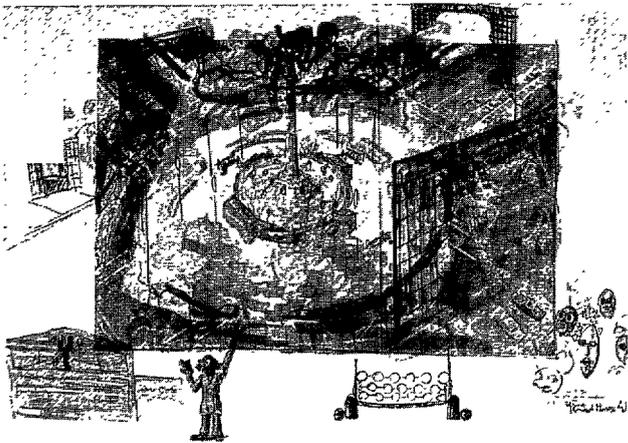


Above Children learn about monument making at a workshop held to help design Frederick Douglass Circle

Left Frederick Douglass Circle at the northwest corner of Central Park is fragmented by traffic lanes



success rebuilding the park from top to bottom-to tackle this undistinguished entrance to the park. The conservancy formed a steering committee of residents to organize a series of public planning events, get the word out and get people



involved. An advisory board of designers, traffic planners and artists was formed to work with the community on a design. As Erana Stennett, the conservancy's government and community relations director, said, "It was mutually beneficial for us to get involved. The project would bring people into the park, and it would strengthen our relationship with the community."

After eighteen months of weekly meetings, the conservancy and the

steering committee launched a series of public events to generate ideas for the circle. The events encouraged people to think about the circle's role in a local and a citywide context, and to join discussions about how to create a functioning intersection and a welcoming public space. Most important, the neighborhood was asked to help prepare a new design.

An open house was held in February, 1995 to inform people about the project, find out how the circle was used and invite opinions. At subsequent

meetings, residents presented findings from surveys they did about the circle and were briefed on traffic planning, the design of urban memorials and Frederick Douglass's role in American history.

In April there was an all-day design workshop. Merchants, residents, property owners, architects, landscape architects, artists, writers,

historians, students and city representatives worked in multidisciplinary teams to outline issues and suggest visions. Computers produced visual simulations of the ideas for remaking the circle that were developed by each team. The proposals ranged from creating a green oasis that extended the landscape of the park into the circle, to building a meeting place with kiosks, markets and street theater, to establishing a paving system incorporating Frederick Douglass' words, and punctuated with monuments representing the different phases of his life.

These ideas and others were put on exhibit and coupled with activities geared toward fostering cross-fertilization between community interests and new designs. Families attended workshops on topics like monument making. Public panels tackled the issues the circle and the workshop proposals raised. Performances recalled the words of Frederick Douglass and the music of his time. At the exhibition itself, visitors could respond in writing and drawings to what they saw and suggest their own ideas.

With this groundwork established, the U.S. DOT provided a \$ 140,000 Livable Communities grant to move the project from planning to design development. The partnership is now working on a scheme that would include new traffic signals, crosswalks, pedestrian lighting and a monument dedicated to Douglass. In addition, urban design guidelines will be developed to encourage healthy retail and commercial development at the circle.

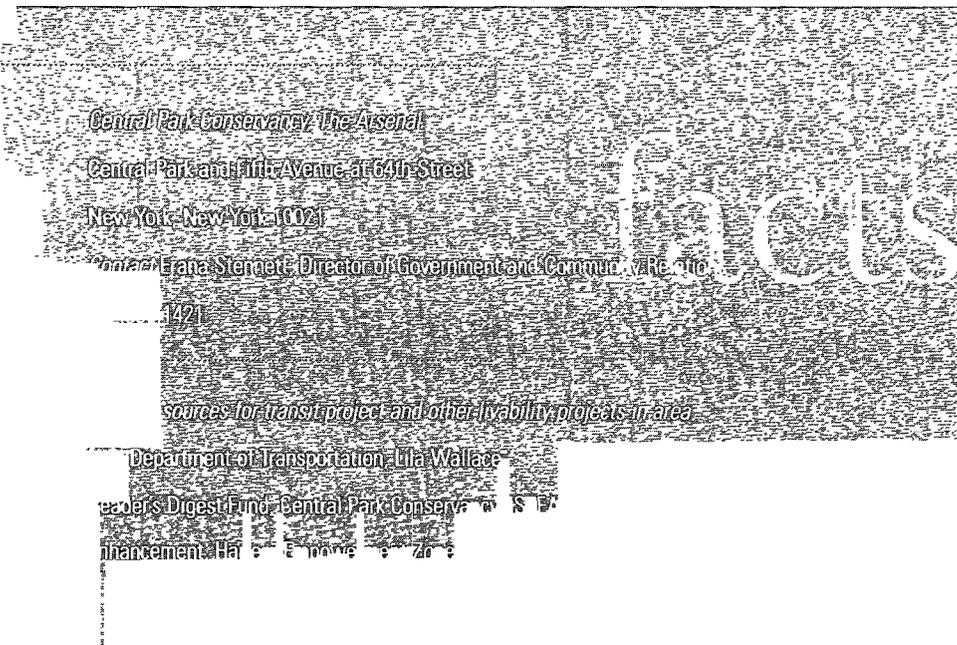
This inclusive approach will pay many dividends. The community's involvement will enrich the new

design, make residents better stewards of the circle and improve their use of the park. City staff and other professionals have been introduced to the neighborhood. And the city's design community-firms, schools like City College (which hosted the design workshop), institutions like the Cooper-Hewitt Museum (which curated the exhibition) and foundations like the Lila Wallace-Readers Digest Fund (which funded the public events)-have been exposed to the problems and potential of this public space. These various interests, working together rather than at cross-purposes to revive the Frederick Douglass Circle, offer a model for reviving neglected public spaces throughout the country.



Above Neighborhood residents and professionals teamed-up at the all-day design workshop.

Opposite page One of the proposals resulting from the all-day design workshop.





S U P P L E M E N T Frederick Douglass Circle / Somerville, MA: Davis Square

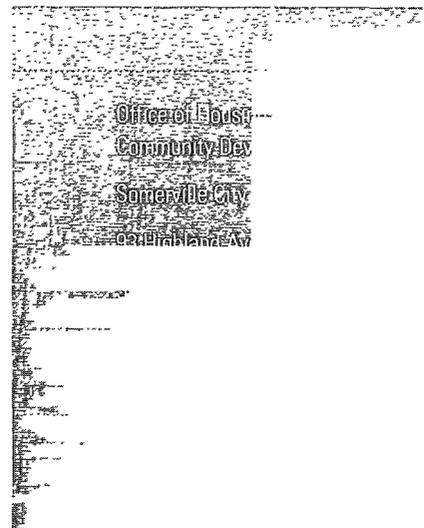
Davis Square shows the impact of transforming a traffic-dominated public space into one that serves as a revitalizing force for the neighborhood.

Davis Square, a principal commercial center in Somerville, Massachusetts, experienced a remarkable renaissance with the extension of the Red Line subway from Cambridge in the early 1980s. This extension included construction of a new transit station in the center of the Square. From its earliest planning stages, the City of Somerville saw the station as a catalyst for revitalizing the Square and promoted commercial development and sponsored pedestrian improvements that help to maintain its traditional urban character and reduce the impact of traffic. These public improvements leveraged private reinvestment in the Square's adjoining residential areas and helped to build a community constituency for the Square.

The success of the redevelopment efforts is largely attributed to close cooperation between the many stakeholders in the process, including the Davis Square Task Force, comprised of local residents and business people, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), and numerous federal and commonwealth agencies.

The plaza is designed to serve as the center of Davis Square, providing a gathering place and a center for activities and outdoor entertainment. The MBTA's Red Line extension qualified it to receive federal transit percent-for-art moneys as part of the first public art in transit programs in the nation. One percent of the cost of constructing the new entrances to the station was used to commission the popular figurative sculptures, some representing local citizens, that adorn the plaza. The art project fit in with the city's goal of creating a community place, a place that residents would view as their own.

The City of Somerville and the task force initiated many complementary projects to accompany the Red Line extension, using the redevelopment, especially of empty parcels, to build the type of community that they had envisioned. Streetscape improvements, the renovation of a local park, storefront facade improvements, the removal of billboards and the construction of housing for the elderly all occurred with a combination of federal, local and private funds.



PROJECT

Corpus Christi, Texas

Staples Street Station and Northside Improvements

Staples Street Station is a lively place to be almost any day of the week. As the hub of the Corpus Christi Regional Transportation Authority's expanding bus system, the two-year-old transfer center serves as many as 4,000 passengers a day. That's a twenty-five percent increase since 1990, when passengers waited at conventional bus stops strung along Staples Street,

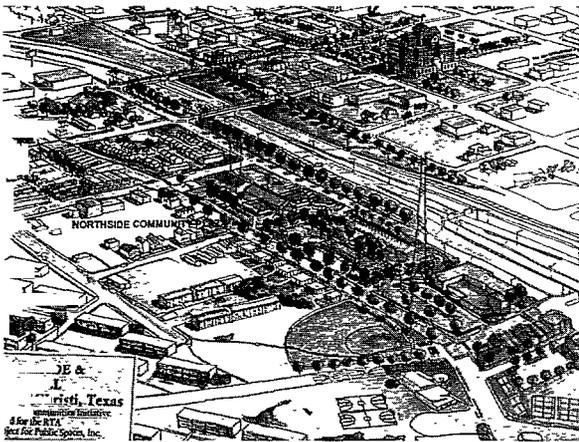
a roomy metal-roofed shelter evocative of a nineteenth-century train shed and handsome historic lighting. Colorful hand-painted tiles, made by members of the community under the supervision of a local artist, adorn the structure. One satisfied customer likened it to "a festive central plaza in a small Mexican town."

But, unlike a Mexican plaza, the station's surroundings are far from

friendly. The fast-moving traffic, vast parking lots and vacant storefronts offer little incentive for people to walk to the transit center. Indeed, residents of Northside, an African-American neighborhood just three blocks from the center, express fear of walking

With its clock tower and Spanish mission-style architecture, the transfer center stands out as a friendly beacon across from the new City Hall at the edge of downtown. It has plenty of comfortable seating,

there. The streets are empty; the sidewalks are deteriorated and poorly lighted; and people gather on corners to loiter and drink.



Left Illustrated map showing the relationship of the Staples Street Station to the Northside neighborhood

Northside, cut off from the rest of Corpus Christi by an interstate highway, has long felt isolated and neglected. Much of the population is low income and depends on buses for even the simplest errands.

The city tried to improve the situation by building a senior center, medical clinic, day-care facility

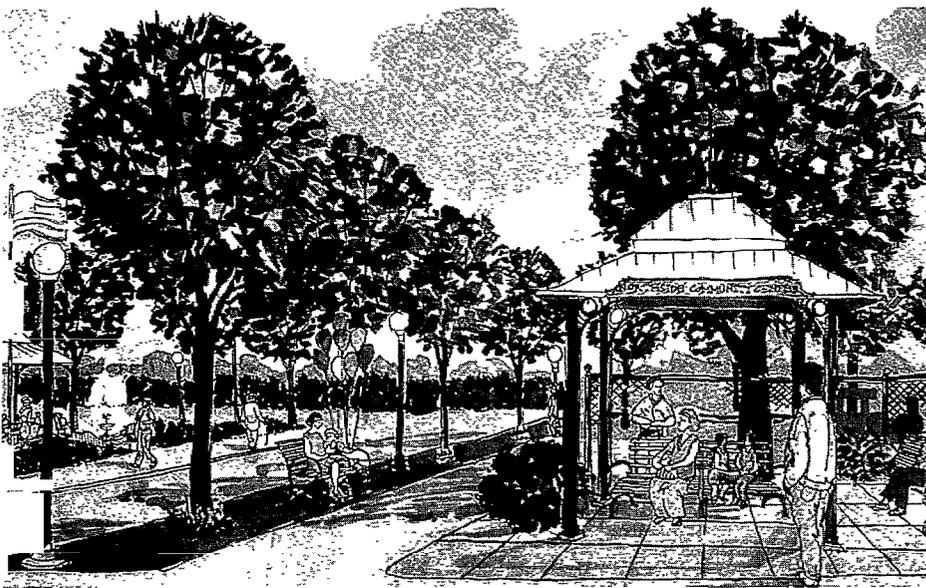
niently located and perceived as unsafe; and the walk to the station, only a short distance away, is unpleasant and difficult for anyone. As Carrie Floyd, director of the Oveal Williams Senior Center, puts it, “We call this place Asphalt Alley!”

Realizing that more had to be done, the RTA requested a Livable

At community planning meetings, residents, civic leaders and directors of the community’s social service agencies agreed on the importance of forging stronger pedestrian connections to the transfer center. They also urged the RTA to create nodes of activity and build new shelters at the existing bus stops within Northside.

But their highest priority was to improve access to the social service facilities by linking them with a pedestrian path to a new bus shelter. They envisioned a tree-lined promenade that could double as a plaza for community events like the Rev Martin Luther King, Jr birthday celebration, and provide a more welcoming approach to the buildings.

Residents were skeptical at first that anything would happen -- or at least, as quickly as the RTA claimed. As Oveal Williams, the elderly neighborhood leader after whom the senior center was named, put it, “Are you going to get this built before I die?”



and job training center within the neighborhood, but even these are hard for pedestrians or transit riders to reach. The buildings are clustered around a sprawling parking lot next to the interstate highway; the bus stops that serve them are inconve-

Communities grant for pedestrian enhancements at Staples Street Station, in Northside and at Six Points, another transfer center in the city. The agency received \$1.3 million to pay for a community-based planning process, design and engineering services, and making the improvements.

Williams was gratified to attend the August 1996 groundbreaking ceremony for Phase one of the initiative which includes new bus shelters, better lighting, and improved sidewalks and crosswalks around the Northside social service facilities. Later phases include sidewalk improvements between Northside and Staples Street Station, enhancements to the station itself and new trees, historic lighting and a median for Staples Street

So far, the project's planners have not been able to leverage as much participation or funds from other public agencies as they had hoped, although the city's parks department has offered to maintain the new trees and landscaping. The RTA

is confident, though, that once a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly environment emerges, there will be more interest from the community, other public agencies and the private sector.

The Livable Communities Initiative is already inspiring activity within Northside. An art teacher is helping children and older residents to design ceramic tiles that will decorate streetlight pedestals and bus shelters, and youth groups are organizing to help with the tree planting. "We're all very excited about the project," declares Carrie Floyd. "The plaza will really encourage community celebrations, and the pedestrian improvements and new bus shelters will make it easier for everyone, especially the seniors, to get here."

Opposite page Rendering of the new bus stop and pedestrian path leading to Oveal Williams Senior Center and other social services in Northside.



Atlanta, like Corpus Christi, has recognized that making a transit facility more accessible to pedestrians improves the streetscape and can increase ridership.

The Atlanta University Center Pedestrian Corridor Project encompasses an area one mile west of downtown Atlanta, serves densely populated residential areas that are crisscrossed by commercial thoroughfares and heavily used side streets, and is home to six



Pedestrian amenities were added to the Atlanta University Center neighborhood

historically black educational institutions. The area is served by six Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) bus routes and three MARTA rail stations.

The Atlanta University Center Pedestrian Corridor Project, was developed jointly by the Atlanta University Center Inc. (AUC) and the Corporation for Olympic Development in Atlanta (CODA). It attempted to resolve anticipated congestion and related traffic issues in the area resulting from use of the AUC as an Olympic venue and to improve the quality of life throughout the greater AUC community after the Olympics by improving pedestrian access to public transit. This was accomplished through a \$3 million FTA grant which funded the design and construction of a pedestrian corridor linking three MARTA rail stations to Olympic venues, to college campuses, neighborhoods and adjacent commercial districts. The Corridor Project plan also included streetscape improvements (tree-lined streets) and upgraded sidewalks with benches, sit-walls and improved lighting; improvements to residential streets within the

Atlanta University Center; revision of bus stop locations; improvements of bus schedules; installation of signage and directional markers; coordination of the AUC shuttles with MARTA buses; development of parking and transportation management plans; and the introduction of new transportation technology (ITS), including direct dial phone information, automated vehicle location devices, and on-board stop announcements and signage.



PROJECT

San Francisco, California

Mission Street

Mission Street on a Sunday morning bustles with activity. Stores are selling fresh produce. Restaurants, filled with the sights and smells of Central America and Asia, open their doors to locals, who come in for coffee and talk. This two square mile area is the heart of San Francisco's Mission District, home to some 57,000 people, many of them low-income, many of them immigrants. It is both the main shopping street and the main transit thoroughfare, with buses and an underground rail line that connect to downtown San Francisco and beyond.

At night, Mission Street is a different story. The character of the street and its reputation for crime lead residents to hurry home from the buses and trains, or to visit markets or *tacquerias* on friendlier streets; people passing through in buses or cars don't think of stopping. Many of the street's groceries, clothing stores and furniture shops—even its restaurants—close at 6:00 p.m., while friendlier commercial streets elsewhere in the city are busy long into the evening.

While Mission Street is far from lost, its confluence of commerce, culture and transit could serve neighborhood residents far better. Recognizing this, in 1995 the community applied for and won a \$50,000 Livable Communities grant to generate ideas for upgrading Mission Street's pedestrian environment and creating a better setting for business and transit use.

The Mission Housing Development Corporation (MHDC), which has been developing affordable housing in the district for 25 years, organized the planning process—three workshops at which community members learned about current plans for the street, voiced concerns, brainstormed ideas and set priorities. Altogether, some 50 people attended—shop owners, residents, community leaders, designers, planners and representatives from public agencies, including the police and transit agencies. Asian Neighborhood Design (AND), a nonprofit architecture firm, facilitated the workshops, listened, then translated the discussion into design proposals.

The main concerns of the community were safety and security, particularly at the plazas that connect two BART stations (the regional rail system) to Mission Street and at the



bus stops where Muni (the city's transit agency) is widening the sidewalk to improve loading and waiting areas. One suggestion was to increase police presence, but the workshop ultimately concluded that Mission Street would be better served by design improvements that

not only made the street seem safer but also enhanced its image, making it more inviting for residents and visitors.

The participants' first priority was pedestrian lighting. Susan Leal, a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, helped the planning group win a \$500,000 Livable Communities grant for the capital costs in 1996.

The project was complicated because Muni had just installed new streetlights-thirty-foot high galvanized-steel poles with cobra-head fixtures that illuminated the street, not the sidewalk, and clashed with Mission Street's vintage buildings and stately palm trees. The planning group requested pedestrian lights, fixtures that looked historic and had a place for hanging banners that would reinforce the street's identity.

Remarkably, the city's Public Works Department figured out how to retrofit the new poles-wrapping their bases with decorative cast-iron moldings, cleaning them and painting them burgundy-red. New light fixtures will be added for pedestrians, and the cobra-head lights will be replaced with new fixtures, the same as those used at Fisherman's Wharf. This will tie Mission Street more strongly, into San Francisco's Victorian image and keep project costs down.

In addition, the jumble of traffic signs is being relocated from streetlights to other poles. Banners (in English and Spanish) are going up to tell people they have entered what the merchants have named the Miracle Mile. The job should be done by early 1997, only a year and a half after the workshops.

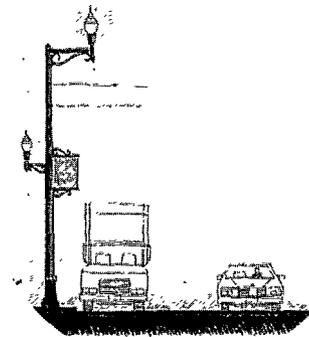
Livable Communities projects work because they bring a sense of place, a sense of pride and a sense of purpose to neighborhoods.

-Janette Sadik-Khan, Deputy Administrator Federal Transit Administration

The pedestrian lighting initiative has been a catalyst for further change. The quick success of the lighting proposal is giving the neighborhood confidence that its ideas can make a difference, and that change can happen. One of the next priorities is adding kiosks with community information and artwork at the newly improved bus stops. Another is tackling the design of the BART plazas, which are full of loiterers and poorly lit, poorly related to the street and

a poor welcome to transit riders.

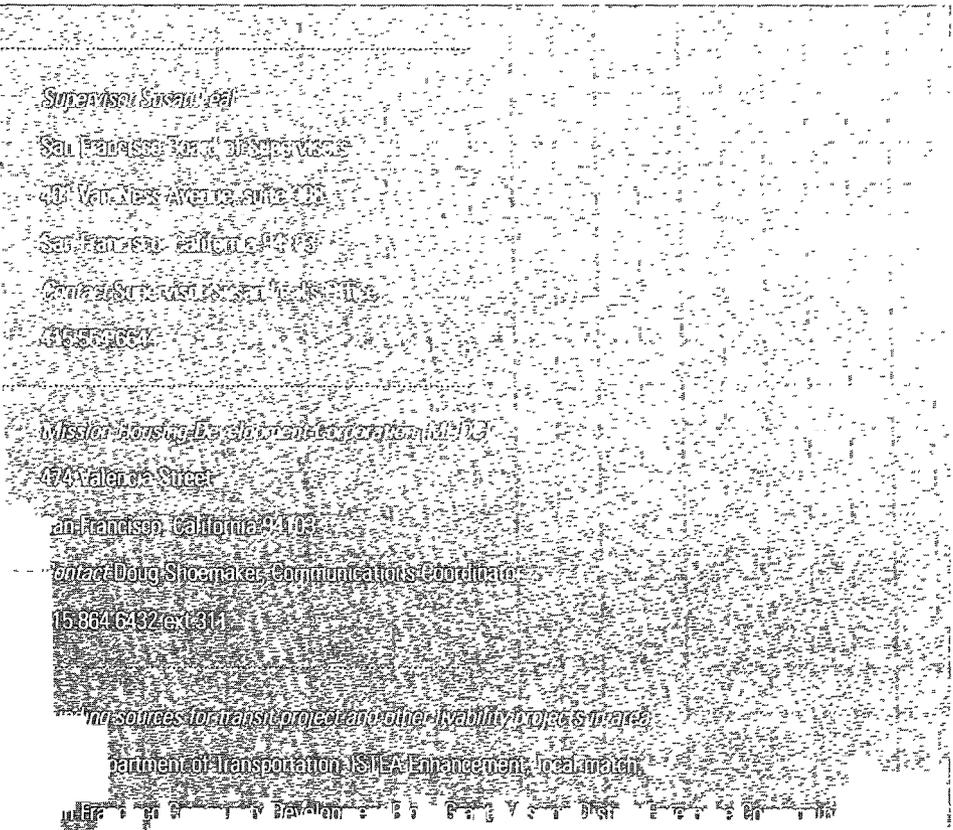
MHDC has proposed a three-phase project to improve the BART plazas by reorienting adjacent buildings so they have entrances facing the plaza, developing more housing nearby to increase pedestrian activity and redesigning the plazas themselves. Says Leal, “The Mission’s solutions aren’t going to come from someplace out of the sky; we’re turning to the very people and activities that make the neighborhood so vibrant and livable to begin with.”



Above Rendering of retrofitted lights with banners

Opposite page, left Photograph of Mission Street with its stately palm trees

Opposite page, right Photograph of Mission Street with rendering of historic fixtures added



Like the BART stations on Mission Street, the areas around Chicago Transit Authority stations were not contributing to the neighborhood in the way they could. Nonprofit and for-profit organizations joined to turn the situation around with small, neighborhood-oriented improvements.

Taking advantage of blighted retail space at transit stations can benefit transit operators, improve the livability of the neighborhood around the station and provide local jobs. In 1993, the nonprofit Edgewater Development Corporation and Combined Properties Management, a for-profit leasing and management company, joined together to create the Edgewater Redevelopment Group (ERG), which undertook to rehabilitate and re-lease the commercial properties owned by the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) that were under or adjacent to four inter-modal elevated (EI) transit stations along the Red Line. ERG's goals for the project

were to introduce transit-oriented retail at the Red Line stations and to encourage commercial investment in the area, in hopes of turning the community around.

The ERG was able to secure an interest-free loan of \$500,000 from the CTA to accomplish the work, which has included the rehabilitation of the facades and lighting of 21 stores in the area. The ERG oversaw the private sector rehabilitation work, encouraged the CTA to maintain other parts of their property such as station entrances, and developed a transit/commuter-oriented tenant mix. The businesses, seventy-percent of which are minority business enterprises, are located next to station entrances and at staircase entrances. The retail mix was designed to provide many goods and services to commuters, and includes

newsstands, coffee carts, dry cleaners, ATMs and a foreign currency exchange.

The project represents significant commercial reinvestment in the area which, according to project manager Marty Goldsmith, usually lags far behind residential reinvestment, making it more difficult to revitalize a neighborhood and create a more livable place. The majority of original tenants have remained, the properties are nearly all leased and the program has begun to provide a revenue stream for the ERG

